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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4814
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SUBJECT: ONE STUDENT DEAD IN DIYARBAKIR STREET PROTESTS

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Diyarbakir chapter of the Human Rights Association (HRA) said police fatally shot a 23-year-old student during December 6 demonstrations against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). According to local media, clashes erupted when demonstrators, who had gathered to protest the prison conditions of jailed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan, threw stones and fireworks at riot police attempting to stop their passage. Week-long protests in heavily Kurdish-populated cities in Turkey's south and southeast are likely to continue until the Government of Turkey responds publicly to Ocalan's conditions of confinement. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) President of Diyarbakir's HRA Muharrem Erbeyli said 23-year-old student Aydin Erdem attended Dicle University. He had joined a large crowd gathered in front of the AKP provincial headquarters to protest Ocalan's jail conditions when he was shot by a plainclothes police officer. According to Erbeyli, the autopsy revealed Erdem was shot in the lungs at close range and killed by a single bullet. Erbeyli believes law enforcement used disproportionate force to disperse the crowd. Turkish National Police have not made any public statements about the student's death.

13. (SBU) A prominent human rights attorney in Diyarbakir said he had witnessed the demonstrations from across the street, where lawmakers and members of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party had gathered to march. He saw police open fire in the air in an attempt to disperse the protesters when the crowd passed the police barricade. He said in addition to the autopsy, a female eyewitness reportedly saw a man in a coat fire on Erdem at close range.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: Small-scale protests began a week ago in Mersin, Adana, Sanliurfa, Van, and Diyarbakir, with crowds numbering in the hundreds. Today, thousands are pouring into the streets, fueled by what Erbeyli says is the government's perceived lack of attention to an issue that commands the attention of Turkey's Kurds - the prison conditions of PKK leader Ocalan, who was recently moved to a new cell which is reportedly smaller than his former cell with no eye-level window. Doubtless, the PKK has a hand in escalating street protests, a common tactic used to flex the organization's political muscle and force the GOT into action. Media report the AKP sent a commission to study Ocalan's prison conditions, but the lack of any changes has increased Kurds' anger. Protests will likely continue until the GOT addresses Ocalan's situation. END COMMENT.

DARNELL